

ELON MUSK GETS ANOTHER NO BID PAYOLA CONTRACT

Space Force may use SpaceX satellites instead of developing its own, senator says

The satellites in question are

part of the data transport layer of the Space Development Agency's Proliferated Warfighter Space Architecture.

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The Air Force may cancel the development of hundreds of Space Development Agency satellites and give the work to SpaceX, one

senator said Thursday—a move that would shut out other companies hoping to bid.

The satellites in question are

part of the data transport layer

of the Proliferated Warfighter

Space Architecture, a planned

network of hundreds of

satellites in low Earth orbit.

“I'm told that the Air Force is

considering canceling

solicitations for this transport

layer on SDA's Tranche 2 and 3,

and instead using Starshield,”

Sen. Kevin Cramer said during a

Senate Armed Services

committee hearing Thursday to consider the nominations of several Defense Department nominees, including Troy Meink for Air Force secretary.

Should the Air Force go through with that plan, it could accelerate the delivery of some capabilities into orbit with SpaceX's existing Starshield constellations—and cement SpaceX's growing dominance in space.

Cutting these bids “means maybe eight, or more, small-, mid-sized companies would not be allowed to bid,” Cramer said.

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from Hegseth's budget shift

Meink said he wasn't aware of the potential move, but emphasized he's committed to more competition within the defense sector, if confirmed.

“One of the things that I push for, particularly over the last 10 years, is to expand competition and expand the industry base. That ends up almost always with the best result, both from a capability and cost to the government. I'm not familiar with those discussions going on within the Pentagon. If confirmed, I look forward to diving into that and assessing where they're going and what they're recommending, but I've not seen those recommendations at this point,” Meink said.

In a statement, the Air Force said officials have not made any decisions on the transport layer of Tranche 2 and 3, and the

service is evaluating “all acquisition programs in the context of FY26 president’s budget deliberations and the administration’s priorities.”

The Air Force and Space Force “are committed to the efficient use of taxpayer dollars and maximizing the delivery of capability to the joint warfighter.

We look forward to sharing the status of our acquisition programs with our stakeholders in Congress and elsewhere when the FY26 budget is delivered in the coming months,” a service spokesperson said.

The potential for canceled contracts comes as the Space Force looks for ways to cut 8 percent from its budget and redirect those funds to new priorities outlined by Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth.

Chief of Space Operations Gen.

Chance Saltzman said he

provided "lower priority"

missions as possible cuts, but

declined to give specifics on

what was offered.

"I'm hopeful that the Space

Force won't take any cuts, and

so I certainly don't want to talk

about potential cuts that may

not happen, because we want to

keep everything we've got...this

is purely a planning drill, we're

not actually ready to make those

decisions yet. So I certainly don't

want to talk about something

before the secretary makes that

decision," Saltzman said during a

Mitchell Institute event

Wednesday.

The Space Force will likely fare

well in the administration's

budget shakeup since the

service was created during

President Donald Trump's first

term, and will be a key part of

Trump's Golden Dome effort.

In line with the administration's

pro-space agenda, Meink, who

has been serving as the principal

deputy director of the National

Reconnaissance Office since

2020, was tapped to lead the

Department of the Air Force.

Unlike Trump's other service

secretary picks, Meink has

decades of experience in the

national security and

intelligence world. After starting

his career as a KC-135 navigator,

he went on to lead multiple

space programs and served as

the deputy under secretary of

the Air Force for space during

the Obama administration.

Meink sailed through a smooth

confirmation hearing, with no

apparent objections from any

senators.

However, two Democratic SASC members have previously prodded Meink on his ties to SpaceX CEO Elon Musk after Reuters reported in February that Meink arranged a multibillion-dollar contract in a way that favored SpaceX, leading the NRO inspector general to investigate whether Meink had improperly skewed the contract toward SpaceX.

“These reports raise concerns about your ability, if confirmed as Secretary, to treat contractors fairly and prioritize the Air Force’s mission over Elon Musk’s business interests,” Senators Elizabeth Warren and Tammy Duckworth wrote in a Feb. 27 letter.